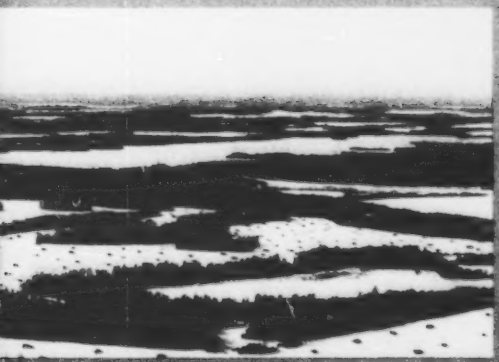
GRAZING RESERVES SOUTHERN



Alberta
FORESTRY, LANDS
AND WILDLIFE
Public Lands

88-03290/

TO ALL VISITORS:

You are welcome at all provincial grazing reserves in Alberta, whether you are taking advantage of the recreational opportunities available or just enjoying the scenery and the great outdoors. But a word of CAUTION ....

The reserves are in a primitive state of development for recreational use and some areas have restricted use at certain times of the year. Although maps showing access points and designated routes are posted at each reserve to assist visitors, **always check with the reserve supervisor before entering a reserve.** He can advise you on local conditions and provide other useful information that will help ensure that you have a safe, pleasant visit.

Visitors are asked to observe the Use Respect Program and obtain access permission from the supervisor. Anyone who sees a violation of hunting or fishing regulations should call the nearest Fish and Wildlife Division office or the 24-hour toll free Outdoor Observer number, 1-800-642-3800.

For information concerning grazing reserve operations or the public access program in the Medicine Hat Region (Bow Island, Pinhorn, Sage Creek, Seven Persons reserves), please contact:

Regional Manager
Medicine Hat Grazing Reserves
Room 116, Chinook Place
623 - 4 Street, South
Medicine Hat, Alberta T1A 0L1

Telephone: 529-3678

For the Lethbridge Region (Hays, Lonesome Lake, Purple Springs, Twin River reserves), please contact:

Regional Manager
Lethbridge Grazing Reserves
2nd Floor, Sun Centre
530 - 8 Street, South
Lethbridge, Alberta T1J 2J8

Telephone: 381-5489

Our final word: please help us keep the reserves clean by packing out everything you take in.

Thanks, and enjoy your visit.

INTRODUCTION

There are 32 provincial grazing reserves - administered by the Public Lands Division of Alberta Forestry, Lands and Wildlife - scattered across Alberta.

Some of the reserves, or community pastures, are natural grassland, while others have been partially cleared and seeded to forage. They range in size from 5 962 acres (Purple Springs reserve, in the Lethbridge area) to 76 388 acres (Sage Creek reserve, in the southeastern corner of the province), but the overall average is close to 20 000 acres.

The main purpose of these reserves is to provide affordable summer pasture for Alberta farmers and ranchers on public land, enabling them to use their own land for crop and hay production.

However, in keeping with the government's multiple-use policy for public lands, the reserves also offer a variety of recreational opportunities, including hunting, hiking, trail riding, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, camping and just plain sight-seeing. Others who use grazing land are oil and gas well operators, pipeline companies, gravel haulers, seismic crews and firewood cutters. Large portions of the reserve also provide excellent habitat for wildlife.

To assist recreationists and other visitors, maps are posted at all reserves clearly showing access and designated routes. Designated routes are public vehicle access trails within the reserve. They give the general public optimum access to the reserve, while minimizing both damage to the grazing lands and conflicts with other users.

Alberta's first provincial grazing reserve was established near the southern border of the province during the bleak days of the depression, in response to a request from drought-stricken farmers. In the more than 50 years since then reserves have been set up throughout the province and now extend as far north as the High Level area. In 1986, more than 73 000 animals grazed on the reserves, which served 1 658 farmers and ranchers.

The reserve program is complementary to other grazing arrangements, not in competition. It serves patrons who cannot afford to take cropland out of production and who, for one reason or another, are unable to use a grazing lease.

Two important aims of all reserves are to operate on a cost recovery basis and to ensure a sustained yield from the pasture. Patrons are charged a grazing fee calculated on Animal Unit Month (A.U.M.) and pay for salt, minerals and pharmaceuticals. (An A.U.M. is forage provided for one animal unit - mature cow with calf or equivalent - for one month.)

Grazing reserves benefit the local economies in a number of ways, quite apart from the increased market value of the cattle that graze on them. Direct employment is provided for supervisors, seasonal riders and part-time employees, while construction and other projects use local contractors and suppliers where practical. Additional money is channeled into the community in the form of provincial grants paid to municipalities or counties in lieu of taxes on the pastureland. In 1986 these grants totalled $387 870.

Most of the funding for grazing reserve development in recent years has come from the Capital Projects Division of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund as part of a 10-year grazing reserve development program. Previously reserves were funded entirely from the province's general revenues.

The reserves are grouped into four regions of the province - Northeast, Peace River, Eastern Slopes and Central, and Southern. This booklet deals with the Southern Region.

The Southern Region is noteworthy in several respects. It was here that the government launched its grazing reserve program more than half a century ago, at the Twin River site in 1934. This was also where the province pioneered the concept of large-scale grazing on irrigated pasture, with the establishment of the Purple Springs reserve in 1957. In addition to having Alberta's only irrigated reserves, the region also contains the two largest reserves in the province - the 76 388-acre Sage Creek reserve and the 76 353-acre Pinhorn reserve, both of which surpass the third largest by more than 36 000 acres.

BOW ISLAND PROVINCIAL GRAZING RESERVE

Bow Island Provincial Grazing Reserve covers 39 028 acres of both flat and gently rolling land about 16 km northeast of the town of Bow Island. Canals from the St. Mary's Irrigation District across the southern portion are used to irrigate approximately 1 100 acres. The South Saskatchewan River runs through the pasture and leaves about 4 000 acres lying south of the river.

The pasture was started in 1965 with land from large leaseholders in the area. Originally, it was part of Alberta Agriculture's irrigation settlement program in which the Department of Lands and Forests shared administration costs, but eventually Lands and Forests assumed full responsibility.

During the mid-May to mid-October grazing season in 1986, Bow Island accommodated 1 663 cows, 1 093 yearlings and about 1 636 calves for a total of 11 975 Animal Unit Months. The grazing association's 75 patrons are mainly from the immediate area but some farm as far away as Coaldale, just east of Lethbridge. A supervisor and three seasonal employees operate the pasture, with flood irrigation contracted out to a private company.

Numerous deer and antelope are found on the reserve, so it is a popular area with hunters, who also come out for the pheasants south of the river. Other recreational activities include canoeing, hiking and trail-biking.

Gas production is important in the area and servicing crews cross the pasture daily. Although there are oil wells west of the site only limited oil exploration has been carried out on the reserve. At one time a coal mine operated on the land but no traces of it remain.

Persons seeking access to the reserve should check at headquarters, on SW16-12-10-W4M (telephone 545-6639). The supervisor will help direct hunters to the game and advise them as to which fields are closed because of grazing cattle. Designated route signs have been posted and an information handout is available.

PINHORN PROVINCIAL GRAZING RESERVE

With 76 353 acres, this reserve is the second largest in Alberta. Its rolling grasslands, divided by steep coulee banks, are considered to be among the best grazing land in the country.

Pinhorn is located along the U.S. border, directly south of Medicine Hat, and is crossed by the Milk River. Its name comes from an old post office on the south side of the river which honored a veterinary inspector serving in the Royal North West Mounted Police. "Doc" Pinhorn inspected all livestock entering Canada at this port of entry.

In 1959 farmers and small ranchers who needed a place to graze livestock in the summer season asked the provincial government to help develop a community pasture. Two years later the government purchased the Bar-N-Bar ranchland along the Milk River and the Pinhorn reserve was started.

During the summer of 1961, some 1 400 cattle grazed on a portion of pasture that had been purchased. At one point the government considered selling part of the ranch, including the buildings, but when the initial grazing proved successful all the land was retained in the reserve. After a trial year the reserve was formally established on January 17, 1962.

Normally the grazing period runs for five months, from mid-May to mid-October. In 1986, a total of 11 623 Animal Unit Months were utilized; 2 028 cows, 1 924 calves and 511 yearlings. About 85 bulls are kept for breeding and some of them remain in the pasture year round.

About 80 patrons from up to 100 miles away bring cattle to the pasture. The first roundup is held in September, when the shipping field is gathered and sorted, with the main roundup coming late in October. Staff consists of a supervisor and two seasonal employees.

In the fall there is a great deal of deer and antelope hunting on the reserve, as well as some upland bird hunting. Canoeing on the river is also popular during high-flow periods. In 1985 a Boy Scouts group camped in the pasture.

The preferred time for non-agricultural use of Pinhorn is from November to April. Access permission should be obtained from headquarters, located on NE17-2-7-W4, north of the river. The telephone number is 868-2405.

SAGE CREEK PROVINCIAL GRAZING RESERVE

When the Sage Creek Provincial Grazing Reserve was opened for public grazing in May of 1978, it consisted of 60 969 acres of the eastern part of the lands withdrawn from the Lost River Ranches' grazing lease. Later, a further 15 419 acres were removed from the same lease and added to the reserve in January, 1979. To consolidate the reserve, an exchange of land was negotiated with a district farmer.

Stocking rates for the pasture were set after making a liberal allowance for the grazing of wildlife. In the first year of operation, 982 cows and 211 yearlings grazed on the reserve. Currently, more than 3 000 cattle are accommodated during the five-month grazing season that starts in the middle of May.

The rolling countryside is cut by the water courses of two creeks and 27 dugouts have been put on the pasture. In 1979 a new set of oval corrals was constructed. The pasture, which provides totally native vegetation for the cattle, has 18 fields and about 130 miles of fencing. Operations are carried out by a supervisor, one seasonal employee and one part-time helper.

Sage Creek reserve is located in the southeast corner of the province about 32 km southeast of Manyberries. As the site is not close to a city or large town it does not attract hikers or snowmobilers. However, it does offer one of the best places in Alberta to hunt antelope, and deer hunting is also popular.

One central portion of the reserve - about 600 acres - has been kept closed to grazing to provide more natural habitat for the wildlife, an arrangement worked out with the Fish and Wildlife Division of Alberta Forestry, Lands and Wildlife.

Information regarding access to the reserve can be obtained from the headquarters, located at SW12-3-5-W4. The telephone number is 868-2181.

SEVEN PERSONS PROVINCIAL GRAZING RESERVE

Sixty-one district farmers take their cattle to the Seven Persons Provincial Grazing Reserve, which is located 11.2 km west and 6.4 km south of Medicine Hat. At present the summer grazing herd consists of 878 cows, 842 calves, 430 yearlings and 28 bulls, accounting for 6 030 Animal Unit Months. When planned development is completed the pasture will be able to accommodate 9 000 A.U.M.s.

The reserve covers about 6 630 acres of undulating to gently rolling pasture land crossed by canals and laterals of the St. Mary's Irrigation District. Water is applied by both flood and pivot methods.

In 1963 the first cattle grazed at the Seven Persons reserve and a year later the pasture was stocked to capacity. The normal grazing season starts about the middle of May and extends to the middle of October.

Farmers are not the only area residents who use the reserve. The provincial hunting dog trials have been held at the pasture and, as there are scales on the property, 4-H clubs like to bring their calves to be weighed. The clubs also hold judging and showing events there, and the supervisor assists the clubs in a number of ways, including helping members repair tents for camping.

Waterfowl and upland game birds are found on the reserve in the fall, providing good hunting opportunities. Habitat in the region has been helped by the provision of numerous dugouts on the reserve.

All parts of the pasture can be reached by walking half a mile or less.

The primary non-renewable resource at Seven Persons is natural gas, and several wells are located on the reserve.

Visitors are not allowed to take vehicles into the pasture and those who are walking should obtain prior permission from the supervisor at headquarters, on NW34-11-7-W4 (telephone 527-0370). Care should be taken when entering fields where livestock is grazing, and firearms are not permitted in those fields.

HAYS PROVINCIAL GRAZING RESERVE

Sheep are the main animals using the Hays Provincial Grazing Reserve, located 0.8 km east of the town of Hays.

In 1986, the reserve accommodated 9 751 sheep, or 6 400 Animal Unit Months. Cattle grazing in the level to gently undulating pasture totalled 436, or 1 650 A.U.M.s. The grazing season is about 4½ months, from mid-May to early October.

Alberta's sheep producers formed an association in 1973 and were given a grazing permit on this pasture-land. Six years later Energy and Natural Resources assumed control of the site and made it a grazing reserve.

The reserve covers 6 700 acres, with approximately 2 000 acres developed for sprinkler irrigation. The remaining 5 000 acres are native dryland pasture. Water is supplied by the Bow River Irrigation District.

The reserve offers a number of recreational opportunities, including deer and antelope hunting in the fall months. From December to March, the site is used by cross-country skiers and snowmobilers. Designated routes and foot access are provided for sightseers who visit the pasture.

Visitors should direct inquiries to reserve headquarters, on SE24-13-14-W4, or telephone 725-2302.

LONESOME LAKE PROVINCIAL GRAZING RESERVE

This reserve is located 28.8 km northeast of the town of Enchant.

The Departments of Agriculture and Energy and Natural Resources were involved in the initiatives which led to the establishment of the reserve in 1972. A year later work began on the pasture and it was opened for limited grazing in 1976.

The reserve covers approximately 11 800 acres of level to gently undulating land. There are 1 300 acres of flood irrigation, served by the Bow River Irrigation District and approximately 7 500 acres of improved dryland grass. The remaining land is native vegetation.

Hunters find Lonesome Lake a good site for hunting waterfowl. Ducks Unlimited has developed four dams for waterfowl habitat.

In 1986 Lonesome Lake provided grazing for 1 904 head of mature cattle and 1 564 calves, for a total of 9 881 Animal Unit Months. The grazing season is about five months, from mid-May to mid October.

Visitors are welcome, but permission should be obtained from the grazing reserve supervisor. Access to pastures where cattle are grazing is not allowed during the season and no vehicles are permitted on the land developed for irrigation.

Details on access and other information may be obtained at headquarters, located on NW1-17-18-W4. The telephone number is 792-3676.

PURPLE SPRINGS PROVINCIAL GRAZING RESERVE

Purple Springs Provincial Grazing Reserve, located 0.8 km east of the village of Purple Springs, was the first irrigated reserve in Alberta. It was established in 1957 through the joint efforts of two provincial government departments - Agriculture and Lands and Forests (now Forestry, Lands and Wildlife). The goal was to assist in establishing viable farms in the area.

The reserve covers approximately 6 000 acres of level to gently rolling land. There are about 1 100 acres of flood irrigation located in two pastures, one at Grassy Lake, the other at Purple Springs. The St. Mary River Irrigation System and the Taber Irrigation System service these pastures.

Fall and winter months provide recreational opportunities such as pheasant hunting, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling. Designated routes are mapped for all visitors, including sightseers. Access is allowed with permission from the grazing reserve supervisor.

In 1986 the reserve provided grazing for 1 217 cattle and 903 calves, or 5 952 Animal Unit Months. The grazing season starts in mid-May and runs through to mid-October. Operations are handled by a supervisor and two seasonal employees.

Further information may be obtained from reserve headquarters, on SW20-10-14-W4 (telephone 223-8030).

TWIN RIVER PROVINCIAL GRAZING RESERVE

Twin River was the first grazing reserve established in Alberta. During the early years of the depression in the 1930s hard-pressed farmers and ranchers in the Del Bonita area requested that a grazing association be formed to provide pastureland for their cattle.

In 1934 the Twin River reserve was established on gently rolling land 19.2 km east of Del Bonita. A year later the first cattle started grazing on this all-native dryland pasture.

Currently the reserve accommodates 1 571 cattle and 897 calves, or 6 811 Animal Unit Months. In addition, 688 sheep grazed the pasture in 1986 - 370 A.U.M.s.

The grazing season varies from 4½ to 5½ months. For steers, the season runs from mid-May to early October, while the breeding field season ends in mid-October. The dry field season opens in the middle of May and runs until late October. Twin River served 56 cattle patrons in 1985 and six sheep patrons.

A variety of recreational activities are available on the reserve. Deer and antelope hunting are popular in the fall months (September to November) and there is fishing in the Milk River through the season. Canoeists also use the river. Visitors who just want to walk through the reserve can follow designated routes.

The only restricted areas at the reserve are pastures where livestock is grazing during the season.

Visitors should check at headquarters, on SW18-1-19-W4, about access. The telephone number is 647-3525.

For additional information on Alberta's grazing reserves, or to obtain extra copies of this booklet or copies of the other three booklets in the series, please write or telephone:

Information Centre
Alberta Forestry, Lands and Wildlife
Main Floor, Bramalea Building
9920 - 108 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 2M4

Telephone 427-3590

Or call the nearest Public Lands Division office.

COMMENTS

Have you any comments or suggestions to make as a result of your visit to a grazing reserve? If so, we would like to hear from you. Please use the space provided below, then clip out this page and send it to the address at the bottom of the page.

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For Bow Island, Pinhorn, Sage Creek, Seven Persons reserves:

Regional Manager
Medicine Hat Grazing Reserves
Room 116, Chinook Place
623 - 4 Street, South
Medicine Hat, Alberta
T1A 0L1

For Hays, Lonesome Lake, Purple Springs, Twin River reserves:

Regional Manager
Lethbridge Grazing Reserves
2nd Floor, Sun Centre
530 - 8 Street, South
Lethbridge, Alberta
T1J 2J8

Pub. No. I/189
ISBN 0-86499-476-1

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